



University of Connecticut Health Center

TESTIMONY PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE February 15, 2011

HB 5326 An Act Requiring the Presence of carbon monoxide detectors in all public school buildings.

Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan, Senator Guglielmo, Representative Giegler, and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, my name is Amy Hanoian-Fontana, Community Education Specialist at the Connecticut Poison Control Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding **HB 5326 An Act Requiring the Presence of carbon monoxide detectors in all public school buildings**. The Connecticut Poison Control Center (CPCC) at the UConn Health Center supports HB 5326.

Installing carbon monoxide detectors is the only way for the general public to detect carbon monoxide (CO) in the air. CO detectors save lives and reduce injury. Operational detectors warn people of the essential need to vacate buildings before CO builds up to deadly levels. Few laws exist regarding CO detectors in schools.

CO is a deadly gas. You can not see it, smell it, or taste it. It is produced by fuel-burning (wood, oil, propane, natural gas) appliances and equipment (furnaces, cars, boats, grills, generators, gas dryers, gas power washers). CO can build up in enclosed spaces if there are malfunctioning appliances, worn or faulty parts, or improper venting.

Recently, the CPCC was involved with a mass carbon monoxide poisoning case. Over 30 students in a Waterbury elementary school were exposed to carbon monoxide and experienced symptoms. A carbon monoxide detector may have prevented exposure to this deadly gas. With over 1,200 schools in Connecticut, HB 5326 would impact the safety and health of many children throughout the state.

The CPCC received 82 calls concerning carbon monoxide exposure in 2011 to date. In 2010, 285 exposures were received. CO poisoning can happen anytime, but calls spike in the winter months as furnaces are turned on, buildings are closed up, and residents look for alternative heat sources.

The medical literature indicates that more than 20% of CO-poisoned patients may develop brain damage. The cost of treatment and care for one child with a lifetime of neurological issues due to severe CO exposure certainly exceeds the cost of placing carbon monoxide detectors in all schools in CT.

Lastly, we recognize the fiscal impact that buying and installing carbon monoxide detectors may have, however, as has been demonstrated in Waterbury, safe and healthy schools are paramount.

The CPCC, located on the Health Center campus is staffed 24-hours a day, 365 days a year by poison experts. The Connecticut Poison Control Center (CPCC) was established under General Statute 10-a-132 in 1957. We are the only poison control center in Connecticut and are certified by the American Association of Poison Control Centers. The CPCC's mission is to protect the public health by providing 24-hour emergency toxicology-related patient care, information, and education for the people of CT and their health care providers. Every 8 seconds someone needs a poison center.

Thank you for your consideration of the Connecticut Poison Control Center's views on HB 5326.

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

January 20, 2011

To: School Superintendents, Facility Directors and Nurses

From: Brian Toal, Supervisor, MPH

Environmental and Occupational Health Assessment

Connecticut Dept of Public Health

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Connecticut Poison Control Center

The recent incident involving a leak of carbon monoxide (CO) gas at an elementary school in Waterbury resulting in over 30 students experiencing symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning has raised concerns over the lack of CO detectors in schools.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas produced by the incomplete burning of fossil fuels.

Exposure to this gas produces symptoms that can range from those that mimic the flu (headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness) to more severe symptoms that can result in death if undetected.

Potential sources of CO in the school include gas and oil furnaces, water heaters, and gas powered tools (shop). Installing a CO detector in the vicinity of each of these sources could prevent a tragedy. You may want to consider connecting the alarm to an existing electronic notification system.

We are recommending that all schools install CO detectors.

Superintendents and facilities directors should seek guidance regarding installation and location of CO detectors from their local building official or fire marshal.

CO detectors are relatively inexpensive (under \$50). They should be certified by Underwriter Laboratories (UL). It is advisable that the model be a plug-in with battery back up and a digital readout indicator. CO detectors have a sensor that should be replaced every 5 years or sooner.

For questions and/or more information refer to the following contacts and websites:

Amy Hanoian-Fontana, Connecticut Poison Control Center: 860-679-4422; hanoian@uchc.edu

Joan Simpson, CT Department of Public Health, 860-509-7740, joan.simpson@ct.gov

Resources:

CTDPH Carbon Monoxide: <http://www.ct.gov/dph/co>

CT Poison Control Center:

http://poisoncontrol.uchc.edu/education/materials/brochures_tipsheets.htm

CDC: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/carbonmonoxide.asp>

Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.: *Carbon Monoxide Alarms Frequently Asked Questions*:

Cc: George A. Coleman, Acting Commissioner of Education